

Class Forces in the 1970s

By Stan Weir

Prologue: Theory and the Political Group

Socialists have remained for over 20 years trapped within objective conditions, unable to perform their necessary roles and often indifferent to the very necessity of social theory. As a consequence, there is not one revolutionary socialist organization, in the full meaning of the term. "Socialist" and "revolutionary" are often used, but rarely have more than rhetorical, anti-capitalist content. As individuals most socialists have developed their own vision of a better society, and have often shared their vision unsystematically with those closest to them, but can find no organization devoting itself (that is, its collective membership) to the job of concretizing and giving life to that vision. For all the admirable expenditure of energy and self-sacrifice, individuals and groups work with limited tools that stunt growth. Therein lies much of the unhappy and even surly atmosphere that surrounds and infuses existing organizations. Slogans are offered, for instance, which may be good, but have little to support them. Those in the general working public reached by the slogans have little opportunity to distinguish between transitional and reformist efforts: Without some supportive efforts, the former can be as unappealing, dry, and husklike as the latter. What ideas socialists do obtain are for the most part gained empirically, with little if any mediation between practical activity and theory. Within the socialist groups, education is generally seen as a process of exposure to the writings of the Marxist greats, histories of the class struggle, critiques of specific areas of bourgeois society (generally related to factional self-justification), and little more. The full-time theoretical pursuits

that can merge the intellectual life of an organization with its day-to-day functions in the outside world generally do not exist, or do so parasitically as the perpetual self-replication of the organization as is.

Here I want to offer as an example of organizational potentialities and problems a discussion of the part of the history of the movement with which I am most familiar. The democratic character of the Trotskyist movement during the Depression gave it an opportunity to involve its membership in concentrated study. Out of that period it developed a considerable body of theory. In turn, the movement gained high morale and considerable self-confidence. There was little internal suspicion of the sort caused today by uncertainty as to the political position of fellow members. There was a great degree of collectivity, and it was even possible for those who most bitterly opposed one another to participate jointly in common public activity. The 1940 split in the American Trotskyist movement caused few morale problems in either the Socialist Workers' Party or the newly formed Workers' Party. On the day before the split the membership belonged to an organization of over a thousand members, and on the next day they belonged to one of approximately half that size. But the members of both groups had deep convictions of their correctness, so that for many the split was greeted with enthusiasm. Each membership would now be free to carry forth its ideas without hindrance, which would have been impossible were there doubt in either organization as to its own cohesion and the ideas of both sides.

With the outbreak of World War II, approximately 80% of the membership of the Workers' Party became employed in heavy industry. Draftable or not, most made the move with enthusiasm. Employment caused no decline in the quality of internal political and intellectual life in the WP. In fact, while there was less time for discussion, its quality increased greatly through the contact with real life and practical activity. However, there was a contradiction between the internal political life of the members and their "outside"

80%

activity. The vital national and international developments continued to dominate internal discussion, but this discussion bore little relation to external activity or to the content of the WP weekly newspaper, Labor Action. The membership read each issue of the theoretical discussion bulletin and the New International, the party's theoretical journal, with avid interest since they were vehicles for internal discussion that brought members growth and gratification. And then there was Labor Action, which was read only on occasion, as when a good article was pushed out of the New International for lack of room, or when one's own article appeared in the newspaper. Labor Action was written "for the workers" — not for the specific workers the membership was meeting each day in the shops, but for that undefined, little-above-average worker who was thought to constitute a potential member of a future "mass movement". Stated or unstated, consciously or unconsciously, the membership of the WP operated on the idea that explosive social upheavals in the near future would put a mass in motion for revolutionary change, and carry their own organization into its leadership. The party which developed the best popular mass line, and thereby proved to enough workers that it had the skills to run a mass movement, would at least be given the chance to become the vanguard.

By 1943 the press run of Labor Action was in the tens of thousands. In San Pedro, California alone, 12,000 copies were distributed to workers each week, primarily in shipbuilding. That situation was not unique. Distribution kept the membership of the WP and especially the women in a state of perpetual exhaustion. A major function of the national office staff became the bundling and mailing of the newspaper. There was hardly a branch whose membership did not become a major influence in two or three of the large progressive union caucuses in its area. WP members, for example, played leading roles in building the Rank and File Caucus in the UAW, a caucus that led a national movement in the industry against the no-strike pledge, against a return to piece work and for a sliding scale of

REF UAW

wage increases. True to and consistent with the orientation of their party and the press, members concentrated almost entirely on mass work. Opportunism of the classical type was rarely involved: They maintained a principled opposition to reactionary ideas and backward officials in the unions. Most avoided the temptation to accept staff or high local union positions. To the "mass" they held forth transitional and fighting alternatives. However, recruitment to the WP took on a low priority, given its belief that a mass party would appear within a decade. The WP continued to grow during the War due to a modest but significant influx of workers. They came in by ones and twos, recruited by close on-the-job contact. As they entered they were immediately thrown into a whirlwind of activity involving several meetings each week. Some stayed only a few months. The party had little success in getting many of them to mass-distribute Labor Action. Since the inclination for that type of activity was not always present, and "native" workers did not want to risk their jobs or the security of their families, the task of maintaining the small mass-party facade was left to those who saw themselves as "colonists".

When the War ended, the "real (industrial) worker types" recruited in the four-year period were the first to leave in numbers. Their recruitment and membership had involved them in little study. They had been attracted by the small mass-party concept and the promise of relatively big pay-offs in the short-term future. (There were a significant number who joined because membership offered them the opportunity to rapidly obtain a high-level education in unionism, thus enabling them to enter the bureaucracy.) It was not that the "workers" were opposed to learning, study, or participation in theoretical discussions, but rather that the theoretical discussions were seldom if ever conducted on subjects involving industrial technology, the society and culture of the work place, or the systemic and societal role of unions. Subjects like the nature of the Russian or capitalist states or imperialism, on the other hand, were never discussed in relation to the world of industrial production.

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The next to leave were a significant group of artists and intellectuals. They departed as individuals, but for a complexity of related reasons. Like others, they had become demoralized. They had lost their basis in wartime industry and some decisive perspectives of their socialist organization had failed. In addition, they had been victims of the generally accepted notion that for socialists to be anything "less" than industrial workers meant inferior commitment. They wanted to resume their careers as musicians, architects, or poets, and did not feel that socialist activity among their peers would be viewed as meaningful. Some had been pressured into industry by the enthusiasm of others, and now they resented it. Down deep they believed artistic endeavors to be socially necessary labor, but they found no acceptance of the idea in their own organization. Their exodus, among other things, accelerated the withering of theoretical activity and creative internal life. Those who remained were thus less able to stimulate interest among those they met on the outside, and within a few years not many among them could sustain themselves in industrial work. Thus the drift back to careers became widespread throughout the party.

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Contrary to Trotsky's prediction, the end of World War II did not bring a defeat to Stalinism or a corresponding growth of a revolutionary democratic movement in the world. The WP's prognosis had proven in some respects incorrect, and very little remained of four years' work in the war industries. Later, the WP was to take on the more realistic perspective of an educational or propaganda group, but the limitations of the past and the growing difficulties of objective political conditions could not be overcome. By its failure to grow theoretically and politically beyond the point reached in 1946, the socialist movement (not merely in the WP, but throughout the Left) condemned itself to stagnation for a generation, and was ill-equipped to meet the influx from the New Left in the late 1960s.

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The unresolved theoretical tasks of one generation inevitably fall upon the next. Moreover, we have generally neg-

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lected the inheritance of theoretical and practical experience available. Consider, for instance, two of the most pressing questions for socialist work today: the statification of the unions and the present function of primary work groups. Statification of the economy was a major question for the socialists in the 1940s: They were necessarily concerned with the regimentation of labor through the Communist bureaucracies in Europe and the USSR and the official labor movement in the US. Today, recent upsurges within the ranks of labor raise questions as to the extent and exact meaning of statification, yet the conception has not been put into writing for collective discussion. We must examine the involvement of official labor in the tri-partite arrangement with government and the employers. Does it constitute a qualitative statification, a trend in that direction, or a modern exemplification of traditional trade-union reformism? Obtaining wage increases on the basis of productivity has become a standard operation for labor's officialdom, and the denial of that method caused labor to leave the Wage Board. The increasing anti-labor decisions by the NLRB are now causing talk of boycotts against the Board in the top echelons of labor's leadership. How do these events effect the viability of the statification hypothesis discussed above?

The significance of workers' relationships to each other on the shop floor has been a recurrent theme in the American Left at least since the days of the IWW. As the supplementary article by M. Guttman indicates, the changes in technology since Marx's time necessitate a full-scale study of primary work groups, for the self-activity of the groups reveals potentials, previously not taken into account, of the working class's ability to manage production. These are the only workers' organizations not susceptible to bureaucratization, and thus are the natural foundation on which to build the working-class organizations of the future. Yet here as well as in other areas in concern, so long as there is no adequate discussion, sources of difference of method and tactics among socialists remain obscure, and suspicion

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continues pointlessly. The subjects discussed briefly and preliminarily in the next section are unfortunately only a few of the many areas in which socialists are not supported in their activities by a fundamental and up-to-date body of theory.*

The main value of the particular heritage being discussed here lies in the concepts and theories of working-class democracy which were developed. The detailed studies of the Russian counter-revolution in the 1940s made it possible to see — as the best elements in SDS would see a generation later — that however admirable historically, the pre-1917 Bolshevik models were inadequate for current tasks. After a lengthy interruption, History has placed upon a new generation the responsibility of further theoretical and practical growth. Missionary zeal and willingness to sustain self-sacrificing activity are only half of what is needed. Conceptions of new institutions must be developed at the same time as the old ones are opposed. Anything less will be ultimately reformist, and the maintenance of group activities will have to depend on directives which have only momentary effectiveness, leading at last to a sense of futility. There is need theoretically and practically, then, to be geared for the long haul, in which the successes come slow, fast, slow, and then fast again. The attitude which follows naturally from such an approach, "being in for as long as it takes and then some", reflects a confidence that is properly consistent with the new era that began to open in the mid-1960s.

* The original form of the remainder of the article contained 27 parts.

1. Yesterday's Theory, Today's Reality

The industrial-union revolution of 1932 to 1941, out of which the CIO was born, allowed American radicals a very

high degree of identification with the official organizations and leadership of the labor unions. Communist, Socialist, Trotskyist, and anarcho-syndicalist parties and groups, each in almost exact ratio to their size, had members who became official labor leaders or who became influential advisors to new official leaders. Particularly from the time of the outbreak of general strikes in San Francisco and Minneapolis, through the inception of the CIO (first as a committee within the AFL and then as an independent federation), to the time of the outbreak of World War II, alliances between radical intellectuals, rank-and-file workers, and a new generation of labor officials came easily. Most often with different goals, though there were many illusions to the contrary, they agreed on one major issue: Industrial unionism as an institution was a progressive development. The alliances were unique and short-lived, but it was under the influence of this period that the American radical movement last developed a full set of attitudes and theories on the labor movement.

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Now, thirty years almost to the day after the close of that period, there is no ideological basis for a healthy or ongoing relationship between the ranks and the officialdom of labor. And, it has been so many years since radicals have been a presence within the unions that it is difficult for them to learn and articulate clearly the ideological basis for the historically demanded re-alliance between themselves and the ranks. The once fresh and progressive young workers who rose from the ranks to the top positions of leadership in many of the unions have long since succumbed to bureaucratic conservatism.

The depth of the bureaucratic degeneration of the labor leadership and the speed with which the bureaucratization process occurred is a principal, and in some cases the principal, cause of demoralization, skepticism, and cynicism among labor militants and socialists — former, present, and potential. Without a full theoretical analysis of the causes of past examples of bureaucratic degeneration and a positive prognosis for the future that is scientifically

based, socialists appear to operate on no more than impressionistic assertions of faith in the working class. The volume of cynical academic literature on the question of bureaucracy grows, undealt with by socialists. Socialists seem unaware that works like Robert Michels' Political Parties, given ever new life by the work of Seymour Martin Lipset, provide a formidable challenge to the very theoretical foundations of working-class socialism as long as they remain unanswered. In fact, the tenets — both implied and explicit — on which the writings of Lipset and Michels are based have almost biblical importance for those who live in the ignorance that bureaucratism is an eternal inevitability. This crisis alone provides a major task for socialists and their theoretical publications. Failure to attack it means failure to win respect and support in the intellectual community.

From the outset of the industrial-union revolution, the followers of the Communist Party in the labor unions set the tone for radicals. Their primary focus was on obtaining official power in the unions. Marxist and other radical tendencies separated themselves from the Communists mainly by their adherence to the democratic principles of internal union government and their lack of opportunism, but their focus was still on obtaining official power for themselves or independent militants. The entire process was aided by the fact that rank-and-file militants were themselves focused primarily on the problem of who would obtain power over formal and official union bodies. It was natural that this should be their concentration because (a) official union machinery was needed just to make the new unions operative, (b) the unions were new in many industries and there were widespread and panacean illusions about what they could accomplish, and (c) the power of the informal work-group organizations in the work place was at a peak and they were able to exercise a great deal of control over the formal local union structures.

But the industrial-union revolution did not institutionalize

around the goals and aspirations that were foremost in the minds of the workers who made it. The primary motivation for industrial unions in labor's ranks came out of the alienation and indignities that workers experienced on the job. Almost spontaneously, it seemed, they formed unions in the work place; but they were dealing for the most part with nationwide corporations. The power of local unions in each work place had to be centralized in order to keep the employers from playing off the workers in one work place against the workers making the same product in another. The major fight to humanize working conditions had to be postponed until nationwide contracts were obtained. This facilitated the transfer of local autonomy to the top union leaders in the international headquarters. The postponement, with the aid of World War II, has lasted for more than a generation. The outbreak of rank-and-file revolts in the early 1960s served notice on a now case-hardened bureaucracy that the ranks intended to resume the fight to win dignity at work.

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Disillusioned with their unions, though not about to reject them, rank-and-file militants today do not focus primarily on obtaining power per se within the formal union governmental structure. They have learned that that is not the means to the end they seek. Instead they often bypass that power fight and seek a direct and radical expansion of their powers or their democratic rights in the total collective-bargaining process. They want autonomy over the grievance procedure, the choice of bargaining goals, and contract administration.

Thus far the main tactics they have employed to pressure for these goals have been voting against the acceptance of contracts negotiated by their leaders, and wildcat strikes. At times these have assumed mass character, particularly as regards the former tactic. Neither of the tactics has been co-ordinated on a regional or national level in more than a handful of instances, and even then the co-ordination has not come out of strong centralized organization. No large-scale progress toward the goals has been made.

Dozens and dozens of local unions within an international have elected rebel delegates to conventions, and again because of the lack of regional or national co-ordination little advance has been made. ←

Does progress await the formation of stronger local rank-and-file caucuses whose power is then centralized nationally? Hundreds of locals have elected new and more-militant leaders from the ranks. This has helped, but it has been insufficient to achieve the needed degree of change. Is the problem again the lack of co-ordination of revolt on a national basis? If so, the task of militants is somewhat simplified and is one of building and waiting, seeking to win power locally and parlay that power by trying to unite rebel locals on a regional and then a national basis. The task would then be to use that power to put collective bargaining to work improving working conditions and real wages rather than for the distorted purposes the leadership used it for after winning multi-plant or multi-employer contracts. This view can only lead militants to resume the power struggles of the Thirties, albeit for different ends. It includes and speaks to only a small part of the change that has taken place in three decades. ←

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF UNIONS

When collective bargaining institutionalizes, unions undergo qualitative changes ideologically, administratively, and even structurally. Bargaining did not institutionalize for the new unions of the 1930s with the signing of their first contracts. The process of bargaining could not routinize and solidify for any one of the new mass unions as long as any one of the major corporations in the industry they were organizing held out and sustained a threat to the rest of their contracts.

Also, the first of the major contracts obtained in steel, auto, rubber, or electric, for example, were most often documents guaranteeing little more than union recognition.

Signatures were applied, but the corporations in most cases continued to resist the process, and open conflict continued. In the steel industry the first real breakdown of resistance became noticeable after Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. That tragic act caused a flood of orders for American steel from as-yet-uninvaded European countries. The crisis that the steel employers had experienced in 1938 was ended. The first real breakthrough and establishment of a contract more nearly resembling the detailed contracts of today was not accomplished until the signing of the ~~Carnegie-Illinois~~ contract in late 1941. And the rest of the steel corporations did not follow suit until the early years after formal American entry into the war.

The story was generally the same in auto, rubber, and electrical appliances. The differences can be measured by matters of months. The sitdown period in rubber did not end until 1938. Slim contracts were won at Sieberling (US Royal in Detroit), Goodrich, and General. Firestone continued resistance. Goodyear held out altogether, and not until it was put under contract in 1941 could the top leaders of the Rubber Workers begin to achieve stability in their lives. Collective-bargaining rights were won at General Motors as a result of the 1937 Flint sitdowns. Ford held out until 1940, and it is likely that Henry Ford and Harry Bennett would have resisted even longer were it not for the fact that NLRB investigators, most of them former members of the LaFollette Senate Investigating Committee staff, had uncovered evidence indicating Ford's use of Detroit's organized gangsters to fight union organization. In electric a contract was won with General Electric as early as 1938, but it was not until the early years of the war that the industry became organized in a substantial way.

At the start of World War II, the majority of America's top labor officials gathered before Franklin Roosevelt like "feudal princes offering their services to a king", and most of the leaders of the new unions were among them. The wartime restrictions that were imposed upon the ranks of labor freed the leadership to complete the organization

Ford

process begun by the ranks, but on a bureaucratic basis. Institutionalization of collective bargaining thus occurred on the worst terms. Compulsory arbitration of grievances became a general pattern through the initiatives of the War Labor Board that labor accepted seats on. The degenerative socialization process labor officials undergo was cemented through a tripartite arrangement between official labor, employers, and government bureaucrats. However, it is incorrect to conclude that the war was the major culprit. Its function was to accelerate the negative process that goes into high gear with institutionalization of bargaining.

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The atmosphere in and character of the local unions in particular during the initial organizing period was one of conflict. The new self-organized federal locals of the early 1930s and the new and often self-organized locals of the CIO a few years later had a character that, for the US and Canada of that time, could almost be described as revolutionary. Open battle and constant confrontation were the methods of the employers and in turn of the workers. The

Revolutionary



Women garment workers forcibly stop scab from entering struck dress factory, Memphis

sitdown strikes and the mass slowdowns were the more dramatic of the tactics used by the members and leaders of the new locals. Equally if not more important were the mass meetings held on company property — in parking lots, in company cafeterias, and even on the work-place floor. The confidence and sense of security made possible by the very physical nature of these meetings freed the participants to release the depth of their feelings about their work and their employers and to put forth and consider the most radical and sophisticated ideas. ←

The early memoranda of union recognition and minimal wage and seniority awards could not immediately cause great change in the attitudes of the ranks or change the character of their locals. The formal contractual victories only whetted appetites for even greater ones. The momentum of "just yesterday" could not easily be stopped. A new consciousness was growing. Moreover, the employers regularly reneged on conditions to which they had agreed, or began new campaigns to quash the drive of the workers, necessitating immediate returns to direct action.

Only when the employers recognized that they no longer had the needed legitimacy to act as the full disciplinarians of the people in their employ, and that the union leadership could be used as a substitute disciplinary force, were they willing to join in building the institution of collective bargaining. The beginnings of qualitative change in the character of the unions from the international to the regional and finally to the local level followed upon this fact. ← Disciplinary

The process by which union leaders become disciplinarians of the rank and file need not and seldom does involve conscious and overt dishonest conduct at the start. The process becomes a natural one once the employers decide that it is possible for them to live with the unions. The establishment of systematized collective bargaining and of "full range" contracts is usually viewed as the cure for most if not all current problems by both ranks and leaders of labor. Unavoidably the hope grows that the contract will allow the making of gains against the employers without the

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quiet

constant conflict, insecurity, and disruption of personal and family lives that characterize the organizing period for new unions. ←

For the ranks, this is an illusion that must soon vanish. Routine, home life, and income may become more stable after bargaining is institutionalized, but the conflict at work goes on. Grievance bargaining that denies the right to strike at the local level mutes it and makes it less explosive. There is no record or official admission of its existence unless the production process stopped. There is even the pretense that some major slowdowns or brief wildcats did not occur, after they have been ended, and in the new world of make-believe that is created, bargaining occurs under unconditional no-strike pledges and compulsory grievance arbitration. It takes some time, however, to intimidate the ranks into an acceptance of that make-believe world.

As soon as the employers accept collective bargaining as a fact of life and their signatures are put on contracts that they do not intend to break in other than a piecemeal way, the top labor leadership particularly must undergo a full change in attitude. For a time they may remain bitterly angry at some or all of the employers or their representatives, but they must now show concern about the employers' competitive position. The successful delivery of all of the things in the contract that have for so long been striven for cannot be made unless the firms under contract prosper and grow. The open and total conflict relationship of the pre-contract days has to go. Now, a care has to be shown for how hard an employer is to be hit. The new situation demands "flexibility" and attentiveness to what the limits are or "you might kill the goose that lays the golden eggs". The rank and file by its very size and the nature of the condition in the work place cannot, of course, be expected to show the needed care. Decision-making powers in the grievance procedure must therefore be placed outside the reach of the ranks and in the hands of the union officials who are responsible for the administration of the contract so that those grievances which if won would set precedents

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to undermine the competitive position can be watered down or discarded.

The ranks, however, do not share the change in attitude of their leaders. They too want to retain and maintain the contracts, but they see no reason for pulling back from a struggle to win a grievance that is legitimate. Their method for fighting a grievance is one of continued battle until won or lost. For moments at a time in the meetings down at the union hall it is possible for them to see the logic of their leaders on the necessity to keep the company in business. That reason is destroyed the moment they physically or mentally return to work. The attitude of the company toward them is one of total antagonism and disrespect whenever the production process is in motion. Schizophrenia cannot live in a reality where there is so much immediate pain and unhappiness. For each one of them and their immediate associates the task becomes how to cheat the employer out of what is expected. If the company survives it will have to come from the labor of the others in the work place besides themselves. The local-level leaders developed during the organizing period find it difficult to act any longer as a link to the top leaders. If they continue to work daily in the production process, they share the attitudes of the people who elected them. Even if they are freed from work, it is they, the local leaders, whom the ranks will move against first in a showdown, and not the leaders at the regional or international level. They must stay with the ranks in order to survive.

The union administrators of the contract at the top cannot tolerate this situation. "Yes, the work is hard and the damned foremen and supervisors of the companies are so stupid that they continue to cause our people to be balled up; but can't they see that if they continue in bull-headed battle, the contract and all they fought for will be lost?" The ranks will have to be disciplined. The hottest heads among the leaders will have to come around to a reasonable attitude or be eliminated. "It's a hell of a thing to have to do, particularly after all the hard work those guys did; in fact,

without some of them we never could have done the job in the first place....but a few cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the welfare of the many....this after all is the real world." And for the leadership it is, if the contract is to survive under existing relationships. It is true that when workers in a work place begin to make justifiable inroads on the ability of their employer to exploit them, they can put that employer in an uncompetitive position, or make it difficult or impossible for that employer to become competitive.

So unassailable was the new logic of the new bureaucrats' new world during the transition period that was the early 1940s, that they spoke openly about their new role due to the existence of contracts. So without alternatives were they that it did not occur to them to show shame. In 1942 Clinton Golden and Harold Ruttenberg wrote a book entitled The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy. In it they describe in detail how the leadership of the Steel Workers Union dealt with militant leaders who resisted compromise. The book is a unique document not only because of its contents, but also because Golden was at that time the veteran director of the Eastern Region of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and Ruttenberg was the educational director of the entire union.

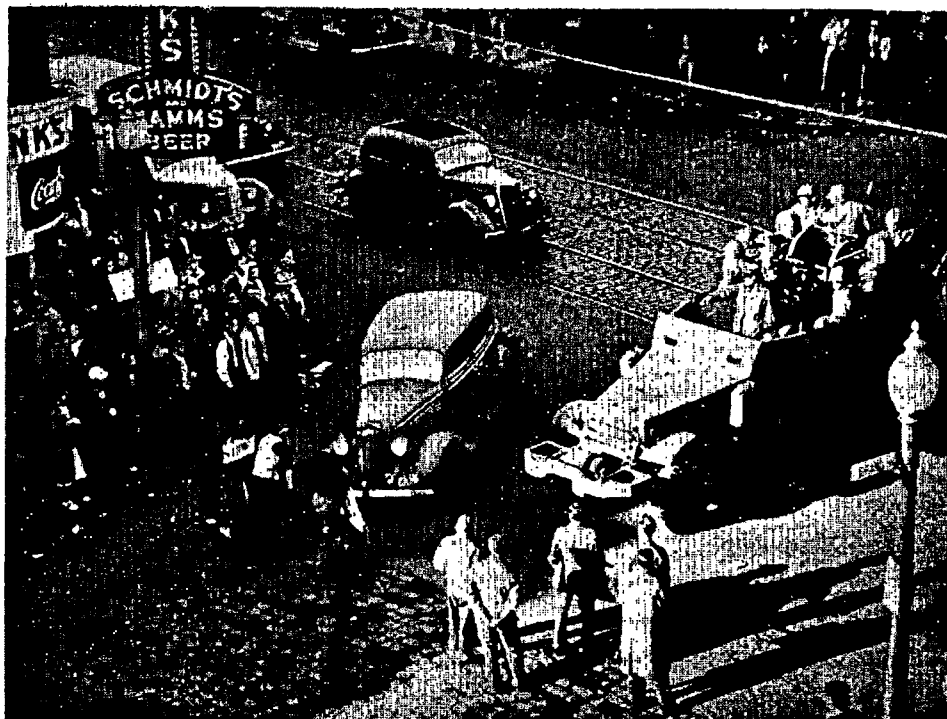
The title they chose to give their book provides some indication of their ignorant innocence. Their self image was a good one. They were key figures in the building of a giant union that was going to benefit and had already benefitted hundreds of thousands. Their ends, both present and potential, for them justified any means. The social-political value of their long-out-of-print document has increased with time, yet it has been forgotten except by students of management. In the wisdom of our retrospection it seems incredible that not one organization on the Left has ever grasped it for the tremendous educational tool that it is. It is probable that the book was passed over because even the most top-flight of revolutionaries are prone to resist

*The Depress
of
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recognition that a period of peak revolutionary activity is past and a transition period of Thermidorian reaction has begun.

The outward pacification of the rank and file requires that the official power center of the union have control over all staff jobs. There is no easier way to remove a dangerously "hot-headed" militant from a sensitive area than to appeal to his or her sense of responsibility to the larger struggle. And so rank-and-file militants with roots deep in their native work places accepted organizing jobs that took them considerable geographic and psychological distances from their home bases.

But though the number of staff jobs is relatively large, it is never large enough to allow the officials to divert the militancy of more than several score at a time. The staffs of the Auto Workers and Steel Workers are each just under one thousand, and the workhorses on those staffs can carry only a limited number of newcomers at one time. Thus, other avenues have to be found for handling militants who resist making the transition to the Thermidor and beyond.



It is at this point that sections of the union leadership enter into collusive relationships with the employers. Employers are always in need of talent to fill management vacancies. The recruitment of a rank-and-file leader not only removes a thorn, but usually provides management with someone of top capabilities and energy. No one on the union side need ask them to conduct these raids. The corruption of the union results when by its silence it gives tacit approval to them. ←

Neither is it necessary for union officials to make formal arrangements with management in order to designate a rank-and-file leader whom they would like to see removed from the job. A staffer comes into the local and baits a particular militant. The news leaks back to management. It is during this aspect of the reaction process that the fearful, the conservative and opportunistic rank-and-filers, receive signals and come forth as an alternative leadership to the one that organized the local.

Even the names of the bulk of the work-place heroines and heroes of the industrial-union revolution have been lost to us. The new and more conservative local leaders are the ones who survive to accept credit for the gains made by the formation of the unions. They are generally — accept during periods of rank-and-file assertiveness — in debt to officials on the staff, and thus are in a weak position in relation to the employer. They owe their new office and status to their willingness to concede local autonomy in the bargaining and internal governmental apparatus to the upper echelons of the union. In short and in a sense, they are willing to abide by Bonapartist relationships, and to see whatever change and reform that occurs be initiated bureaucratically from above.

The transition caused by the turnabout of purpose of the labor leadership that was necessitated by the agreement of the employers to institutionalize collective bargaining, in time instills in the leadership a contempt for the ranks. Add in the guilt that has appeared half-recognized and unadmitted, and all the ingredients for a recipe for cynicism

are present. Ingestion of it for any extended period frees the leadership to exploit their new position to in turn improve their economic and social status. Externally or internally, there is no longer anything present to help ward off full infection by the virus of bureaucratic conservatism. Kafkaesque metamorphoses occur. Consciously corrupt elitism can now be pursued.

The establishment of contracts with what appear to be comprehensive grievance procedures establishes a formal dual power within an industrial-type local union. Now not only is there an entire set of officers, headed by the president, vice-president, treasurer, and recording secretary, all holding offices divorced from the work place and process, but there must be a series of committeemen, committeewomen, and stewards inside the work place to administer the contract and grievance procedure. They are the most accessible to the ranks and thus potentially the most dangerous to the bureaucracy. They have no responsibility for presenting the face or the official policy of the union to the public. They cannot be trusted to assume full authority in the grievance process. By contractual definition the international or staff representatives had to be given the power to determine with top local management the destiny of all grievances that departmental-level management denied.

The on-the-job officers of the union are not immune from bureaucratic conservatism. If they are freed from the oppression of the work process to spend all or part of their time at work processing grievances and handling union business, both management and the international union get in position to cheat stewards and committeemen and committeewomen of their basic militancy. As bad as the buying and selling that goes on is the change in plant union structure from that which existed during the organizing period. The early period of the union's life demands that the union have at least one key person, representative or steward, for each foreman so that a maximum number of workers in every corner of the work place get signed up

→ and stay organized in the union. Most of the good ratios of steward representation established in the 1930s have been eliminated. Ratios as low as one to fifteen have become as high as one to several hundred. The ranks in such cases were promised that full-time stewards with their own offices and telephones in the plant would allow better representation. But experience has shown the opposite. Their aristocratic position and the impossibly-large size of the work-place territories they represent negated the advantage gained in their becoming full-time, along with the negation of the freedom gained by the checkoff dues system and union shop.

Despite the estrangement caused between ranks and union work-place officials and the increasing number of contracts which widen the ratio of steward representation, they remain the most accessible, the most often challenged and changed, and the most important stratum of official leadership to the rank and file of the unions. It is no accident that there are few unions that provide the work-place officials with any automatic standing in the local union governmental apparatus. That government is officially controlled by the officers elected to preside over the business of the union that can be conducted outside the work place. It is the president, vice-president, and so forth who are most likely to side with the international in any conflict between the local and national center, particularly if the local is large enough to afford part-time or full-time employment positions for one or more of its outside-the-work place officers. The 1967 wildcat strike of GM workers in Mansfield, Ohio provides the classic example. The disenfranchisement of the shop stewards in turn disenfranchises the ranks.

The reactionary changes in union structure that began apace in the early 1940s continue to this moment. The reform of the Steel Workers grievance procedure that I. W. Abel has been promising the ranks of that union since 1965 is right now being instituted. It weakens the right of the stewards to bargain with the foremen and places that right solely with the assistant grievors or grievance committeemen. This automatically changes the representation ratio

from roughly one to thirty to one to two hundred or more. In the face of these changes the ranks of labor are demanding a reversal. Since the early 1960s, and particularly at the Special Bargaining Convention of the Auto Workers in April 1967, the demand for a ratio more like that of management, or one to fifteen, has been in the forefront of the rank-and-file demonstrations. The right to strike at the local level has become a major issue all over the mass-production industries as a result of the upsurge in militancy. The steel workers have not yet had the opportunity to respond to Abel's latest move. By contract, union government and ideology, the relationship of the ranks of labor in the mass-production and transportation industries to their officials is today very different from that period in which most radicals last defined attitudes, long-range programs, and perspectives.

Another factor in the weakening of formal rank-and-file democracy has been a major population shift. Since the early 1940s Americans have been a population on the move. The old ethnic and cohesive working-class neighborhoods nearby the industrial work places have become all but extinct. Informal organization in the work process no longer has supplemental aid from informal organization in the neighborhood. Only as racial and ethnic minorities in the central city cores gain more employment in city industry does the advantage return. Thus, on two counts separated from and in addition to changes already discussed above, the institution that is the local union, using the monthly meeting to legitimize its authority, has lost much if not most of its use value and authority within the ranks of labor.

The post - World War II automobile "explosion" and high employment levels have (a) destroyed living-area organizational formations that were used to promote attendance at union meetings, and (b) created working-class suburbs that are distant from the work places. Not only have they atomized former living-area concentrations, but they have made it a considerable physical and nervous strain to get to and from union meetings in city core areas. With the

disappearance of the "taken liberty" to meet in mass on company property when necessary, it was the local union meeting that was supposed to provide a total forum for the ranks. No substitute has yet been conceptualized.

II. Centralization of Capital and Internationalization of Labor

In 1966 a total of 98 firms with combined assets of \$4 billion were acquired by large mining and manufacturing companies. Of these, the top 200 US industrial corporations alone acquired companies with assets of \$2.2 billion. At the end of 1964 the 20 largest manufacturing corporations had \$83 billion in assets, one quarter of the total assets of all US manufacturing companies. The 200 largest firms accounted for 57% and the top 1,000 for approximately 76%. The Federal Trade Commission Report for 1967 estimates that if the current merger trend of that time continued (and thus far it has), 75% of all corporate assets in the US will be in the hands of 200 corporations by 1975.

The nation's 50 largest firms have a power of their own. Such companies — like GM, US Steel, Goodyear, Alcoa — have not been engaged in a mad rush to acquire firms that manufacture products different from their own. However, the next 100 to 150 firms have been growing in large part through joining firms in entirely different branches of industry. Much of the growth has come through financial manipulations, through the kind of speculation in which the opportunities for big financial gains and for growing financial power are the chief motivating factors. In other words, the mergers have been based not so much on gaining more efficiency and greater control of the market for particular products, expanding the company's interest within a particular industrial domain, but rather on insiders, speculation, and empire building. There is no real transfer of skills when an aerospace firm takes over a meat-packing or a sporting-goods company, or a coal company combines with one in copper. When Kennecott Copper took over Peabody Coal the owners acquired the sort of power in regions of

Utah, however, to exert political domination of the state's legislature.

Just below is the percentage of distribution of mergers by type of merger between 1948 and 1968. The figures are from the Federal Trade Commission Report of March 1969.

Date	Horizontal	Vertical	Conglomerate
1948-51	42%	20%	38%
1952-55	37%	10%	53%
1956-59	28%	19%	53%
1960-63	12%	25%	63%
1964-67	12%	9%	79%
1968	4%	7%	89%

Below is a diagram of the more than 15 different international unions involved in collective bargaining with a classical conglomerate. The number of separate contracts geometrically exceeds the number of international unions, because different locals or groups of locals within a particular international union have different labor contracts.

Ling-Temco-Vought (LTV)

Braniff Airways	Jones and Laughlin
Airline Pilots	Steelworkers
Teamsters	Mine Workers
Machinists	Electrical Workers (IUE)
Many Unorganized	Railroad Crafts
LTV Electrosystems	LTV Ling Altec
Auto Workers	Electrical Workers (IUE)
Allied Industrial Workers	Auto Workers
Many Unorganized	Machinists
LTV Aerospace	Okonite

Auto Workers
Many Unorganized

Wilson Pharmaceutical

Meat Cutters
District 50
Chemical Workers

Wilson and Company

Meat Cutters
Others Unorganized

Electrical Workers (IBEW)
Rubber Workers

Wilson Sporting Goods

Meat Cutters
Textile Workers
Chemical Workers
Clothing Workers
Teamsters
Leafer Workers

The tremendous increase in the trend toward the conglomerate-type merger listed just previous to the diagram above has slowed somewhat since 1968, due to breakdowns in both Ling-Temco-Vought and Lytton Industries and resulting pressures from the courts as new mergers have been applied for. Few corporations have such a spectacular collective-bargaining schedule as does LTV. Hundreds of corporations, however, deal with a dozen or more unions in unrelated industries. If there is a strike in one set of work places owned by a firm of this sort, the other work places are free to continue to work and profit and cover strike-incurred expenses. General Electric, which is not so widely diversified, whipsaws labor with a variation of the same tactic. GE negotiates over 90 different contracts with different sets of union representatives, although some of them are in the same union. Thus, when dealing with any of the many variations of the conglomerate-type corporation, the different unions or sections of unions are faced with the fact that their different contracts come due at different dates and are administered by union representatives not in regular communication with one another. Management picks the weakest possible unit in order to arrive at a pattern contract, and then uses that pattern to bring the rest into line.

In order to be able to check this process that so weakens the strike — labor's primary weapon, the official union leadership at the very top has been forced to try to co-ordinate the efforts of all unions under contract to a single multi-corporation. The greatest single example was led by IUE in its dealings with GE and Westinghouse. Ultimately 10 other unions were brought into negotiations. GE claimed that this was co-ordinated bargaining which forced it to negotiate 11 contracts simultaneously, and walked out. A US circuit court ruled on behalf of the union after the union claimed that it was merely engaged in coalition bargaining. In other words, the IUE was the only contract negotiated, and experts from 10 other unions were merely aiding it at the table. Since the corporation has always been allowed to bring anyone it chooses to the table, labor was also granted the same right — with the proviso that if unions actually began co-ordinated bargaining the court would rule against them. This coalition development thus represented progress, but unions will have to go through the same process repeatedly at great cost in finances and energy. Moreover, IUE represented the one great successful example of the development. Only in one or two instances has the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, formerly headed by Walter Reuther and now headed by I. W. Abel, been able to get four or five unions together and negotiate a single contract-expiration date for them. Since the UAW left the AFL-CIO, the IUD has declined in strength. The crisis remains, compounded by the development of the multi-national type corporation which requires international co-ordination of the bargaining process, again by the present labor officialdom, if the unions are going to maintain their bargaining strength even at no more than present levels.

The multi-national corporation is not a small additional problem for the labor leadership. Already it is a major one — inseparable from that created by the development of the conglomerate. The IUD publication Viewpoint (Summer 1971) estimated that foreign operations "accounted for at least

one quarter of sales, earnings, and assets, or employees of 80 of the top 200 US corporations at the end of 1970." In that year they produced an estimated \$200 billion worth of goods and services overseas. In the 20 years from 1950 through 1969, the value of US investments abroad increased almost fivefold, from \$31.5 billion in 1950 to \$143.4 billion in 1969. \$108 billion was private investment, of which \$70 billion was direct investment by US-based multi-national corporations in subsidiaries abroad. Much of the last sum was in mining, smelting, and petroleum, but \$30 billion was in manufacturing—a threefold increase in a decade. The centralization of capital was but one of the major factors following this growth. New transportation technology now enables the swift movement of producers, goods, machinery, and technical skills over great distances. And the development of instant communication systems has made pos-



sible the centralization of decision-making by the new giants. In fact, the more the corporations have spread out on an international scale, the more the power of decision-

making within them has been centralized. With their new world view it is easy for them to pick the country in which they can produce goods at the lowest costs, and pick the country in which to declare profits because of low taxes.

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To organize all the major work places owned by a corporation within the US and Canada is no longer sufficient even for the needs of the labor bureaucracy. The new mobility and flexibility of the corporations threaten the ability of officialdom to produce for the ranks at the present levels of success — particularly in the areas of wages and fringe benefits. The loss of jobs to foreign countries poses still greater threat to their power base. In sum, the very basis on which they have maintained their position in the tripartite arrangement established between themselves, the em-

← quote

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ployers, and government bureaucrats is being chipped away.

If the present official labor leaders are to make a beginning at a solution of the crisis presented to them by the development of conglomerate and multi-national corporations, they will have to make considerable changes in the structural, governmental, and administrative forms of the unions they lead. If they do, it is highly improbable that they will make efforts on their own to increase the levels of rank-and-file participation. The real likelihood is that if left to themselves they will attempt to parallel corporate change and further centralize the decision-making processes within the total union structure. The questions are : Will rank-and-file militants simply counterpunch by only putting obstacles in the path of the changes, offering no alternatives to the present structure ? Or, will they take the opportunity to fight for long-overdue changes in institutional forms from bottom to top of the unions, changes that centralize the power of the working class through structural forms and procedures that for their very success demand the full participation of the rank and file ?

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Due to the changes indicated above in regard to the globalization of American capitalism, for the first time in American working-class history objective conditions demand that workers develop a consciousness of their international role and lead in the establishment of international solidarity. The direct inter-relationship between Nixon's floating of the American dollar on foreign exchanges together with the imposition of the 10% surcharge at the end of last summer, and the further introduction of wage-price controls based on productivity, dramatize this need by revealing the unity of the domestic and international crises. Through the Nixon Administration, American employers have provided the nation with its first great issue for class struggle since the Depression, and have at the same time precipitated the first international crisis which has made

globalization



clear that American labor is a commodity on the international labor market.

An example of the need and objective possibility for solidarity is presented by the relations of US and Canadian labor. In the 1930s and through World War II there was a widespread sense of national inferiority among Canadian workers. They resented being far more aware of US politics than Americans were of theirs, and, sensing that they were still to a degree under the domination of Britain, resented higher levels of material consumption just across the border. It was common in the 1930s to hear Canadian workers hold forth for the elimination of the border and the creation of one big country, since this would bring a quick expansion of American capital and an increase in jobs. (Canada, it should be remembered, remained in the depths of the Great Depression right up to her entry into World War II.)

In the post - World War II period and with the American domination of Britain on a world scale, US corporations moved into Canada in large numbers. Today the economies of Canada and the US are inseparably intertwined, so that a social crisis in one is automatically transferred to the other. The high degree of industrialization in contemporary Canada has given its working class a sense of its own power. There is a new militancy of Canadian youth and workers



Members of the Canadian Chemical & Textile Union being arrested in the Texpack strike in Brantford, Ont. August, 1971

in general, reaching the point at which an official journal of the Canadian Department of Youth publishes an analysis of "The Coming Youth Revolt in Labour" (Labour Gazette, November 1971). And the attitudes of independence and self-determination are by no means limited to French-Canadians. As a result of rank-and-file pressure for independence the Canadian Labor Congress, in summer of 1970, adopted a series of guidelines for the pursuance of autonomy. Last summer the Canadian Caucus of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphate, and Papermill Workers went to the International convention and proposed (a) that only Canadian delegates elect the three Canadian vice-presidents; (b) that a per-capita levy be administered by the union's Canadian director rather than the union's US officers; (c) that the Canadian director be authorized to approve Canadian contracts; and (d) that a supplementary strike fund be established in Canada. The convention delegates rebuffed the Canadian caucus on all four proposals, thus strengthening the position of rebel locals like the one in Gatineau, Quebec that are seeking near-complete independence. Meanwhile, the Canadian pulp and sulphate union has wired Nixon protesting wage controls and the surtax, and has come out for its merger with the United Papermakers and the Printing Pressmen.

As these examples and others demonstrate, Canadian workers are no longer willing to tail-end American unions in the old ways, and any solidarity in the future will necessarily come on an equal-partner basis. American radicals still know little of Canadian politics, labor, and society in general. The elimination of that condition would be of great value to the American working class, and for socialists would be the first step toward a direct alliance with Canadian socialist organizations.

Forshadowed
split in IAW

III. The New Work Force

American society has experienced only a fraction of the social change that automation must inevitably bring. We

have but to look backward. The introduction of the assembly line on a mass basis began as early as World War I, but not till the mid-Twenties were there enough semi-skilled jobs to create the basis for large-scale industrial unionism. Regardless of all the education to the idea accomplished by socialists like Eugene Debs and the Wobblies, the workers who could benefit by industrial unionism had not until that time the power to make the vision a reality.

Three further ingredients were necessary before industrial unions could appear and stabilize their existence nationally. A societal shock was needed to jar the feelings, ideas, and consciousness to such an extent that Americans could free themselves relatively to break with the routine, traditions, values, institutions, and ideas on the basis of which they had been operating. The outbreak of the Depression in 1929 provided that shock, a break in the continuities and a release that allowed workers to begin creative construction of new institutions. Independently organized industrial-union locals formed by rank-and-file workers, who

Secret
Shock



had the day before been on the bread lines, made their appearance with the first upturns in employment in 1932. Through the Twenties and earlier, they had endured the disruption, exhaustion, and anxieties that assembly-line methods brought to their lives without being able to retaliate openly or on a large scale. For this new level of struggle they not only had to establish their union securely at the work place, but also had to reach out to obtain economic and social solidarity with those in other work places of the same industry. An entire communications network had to be created. To accomplish this, the workers needed to acquire very rapidly a second ingredient: a source of writing, legal, and other technical skills, which were ready and available in the radicalized sections of the middle class. Freed to leave their class mainly by the Russian Revolution and the plague of unemployment that had hit the middle classes, intellectuals in hundreds of large and small industrial cities offered themselves to the industrial-union revolution. Although radical political organizations many times played a role in this development, it was not essentially accomplished on the basis of national directives from the side of either the workers or the intellectuals. Who made the first contact with whom is not important for the discussion here. What is vital is that the basis for an industrial-union network stretching over the US and Canada began with independent alliances between workers and radicalized intellectuals on a city-by-city and region-by-region basis.

← examples?

By 1935, the viability of the industrial unions had been proven to the point that a section of the labor bureaucracy was compelled to recognize and incorporate the movement. Rebellions and revolts in the steel plants had already forced the companies to improve conditions somewhat in the hope of keeping out unions, or co-opting the newly formed unions that had just appeared. Consequently the coal operators were often losing numbers of workers to nearby mills. John L. Lewis, leader of the United Mine Workers — the only large, fully industrial union on the continent — thus

found his own position unstable and needed unions in steel particularly with which his own union could deal easily. As the independent and often federally-chartered union locals demonstrated the inevitability of unionization in mass production and transportation, Lewis through the coal miners provided the third ingredient. To establish industrial unionism on a North American continent officially dominated by Anglo-Saxon law, tradition, and values, the UMW provided funds and personnel for the creation of a national organizational structure in the US and Canada. When Lewis and the cadre of young organizers with whom he had surrounded himself inside the AFL's Committee for Industrial Organization walked out of the old federation's convention to set up the independent CIO, they signaled the end of the automatic domination of the aristocratic building-trades unions over organized labor.

We know today that the combination of new levels of mechanization and computer science which have come to be identified as automation have caused and will cause further technological unemployment and dislocation. We know that automation de-skills workers, technicians, and professionals. These realities have been argued by liberals and radicals to the point at which they bore readers of liberal and radical publications: To continue simply agitating against these negative results makes a humdrum cliché of human tragedy. But what are the feelings and attitudes of Canadians and Americans who have experienced automation, or who sense that automation could soon reach into and disrupt life in their work places? What shocks have occurred and what forces have been broken loose? Is it possible that the terror of automation exists without at the same time freeing the thinking of those in the experience to consider new ideas involving basic institutional change? What new ideas are already being "batted around" among past, present, and future victims of automation? What new ideas does the new objective and subjective condition call forth for possible testing that have not as yet been articulated or conceptualized? Does automation present the possibility

See
Aenwood

Charles R.
Walker

for the creation of new vehicles for social change as did the introduction of assembly-line techniques? Charles R. Walker claims that when a work place changes from labor-intensive to capital-intensive or continuous-process techniques, there is a consequent shift in the attitudes of workers: They want to increase their powers of participation in the work-place decision-making processes. (See Walker's article in the Harvard Business Review, January-February 1958.)

← good
findings

← Harvard
Business
Review
1958

What other possible positive conditions are created by automation? We must ask if automation has for example done anything to create the basis for a new alliance between sections of the working and middle classes. If so, why, on what magnitude and level, and what type or types of organizational vehicles are needed to make it operationally progressive and stable? Even potential answers to these questions will develop our ability to stimulate enthusiasm among our public and ourselves.

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A historic parallel of considerable importance exists. Eric Hobsbawm asserts that the period of industrialization in Britain (roughly 1790 to 1840) and the present period of automation are more like each other than like any of the periods in-between, from the point of view of the eruptive changes in working-class and middle-class consciousness and work life and the consequent potential alliances between the two classes. Industrialization created violent ruptures in the nature of work and the ability of workers to make decisions about the planning of work processes, creating technological unemployment for both cottage-industry workers and middlemen. In the resulting "Luddism", middlemen joined workers in the bands that roamed in search of new machines to destroy. The destruction was not, however, wanton as many historians have reported. Rather, the bands directed their activities against the giant looms built for factory use, but not against the smaller ones in use in the cottages. Giant harvesting machines were dismantled and their full introduction delayed until the 1840s, when an expanded labor market could absorb the surpluses created by

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Historic
parallels

the new machines. All labor-saving machines were considered reactionary as long as their introduction hurt the human condition of the workers. The British Government put a larger army into the field against the bands than it sent against Napoleon. American socialists have yet to appreciate the importance of this parallel, to integrate the ideas of Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, and George Rude on Luddism and mob action into a view of current reality.

PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS

The unionization and radicalization of workers in the public sector, particularly at the state and city levels, is directly related to the national crisis in urban and suburban centers. In the last two decades city professionals like social workers and teachers have been forced to do the dirty work of the society in a way similar to that of police. Professionalism survives with great difficulty and sacrifice. In sections of many of our cities it is impossible for city employees to perform their jobs without fear. To solve the tax-base crisis would provide only partial solution to the problems of city, county, and state employees. For them a decent work life cannot be obtained without a democratic stabilization of city and suburban life. In this fact, more than their low salaries, is the reason for their radicalization, present and future. The relation of state employees to city and county employees is not primarily the indirect one created by conflict over allotment of tax monies. The most substantial section of state employees in most industrial states is involved in mental health. Life inside a mental-health hospital provides a stark realization of the actual conditions of city life. Mental-health employees work every day with humans cast off by the cities. Often they see people forced in because ghetto police can use the institution to get around habeas corpus. In only a slightly different way, the employees in state penal and reform institutions get the same underview of society. It is no accident that AFSCME is among the most socially-oriented of unions, and that the

union's members are among the most involved in politics as conducted today. At the same time, it should be no surprise to Marxists that the same unionists are also the most ready for a progressive third-party development.

Despite wages that are in most instances below official poverty levels, the primary motivation for the new unionism comes with the need to improve working conditions. Monetary considerations enter, but in the following way: Only a society willing to treat its mentally ill and most uprooted in a decent and human fashion could offer decent working conditions for the employees providing the direct treatment. Skeptics may ask if there is such a consciousness among state employees in general. The consciousness varies, as in all situations, but is verified by the increasingly political character of the new public unionism. It is the task of socialists to make direct contact and help to provide concrete proof.

An understanding of the new public unionism and of the angers and enthusiasms behind it demands recognition of still another phenomenon only indirectly related to low wages. For over two decades, from the beginning of World War II until the mid-1960s, civil servants were bilked through a set of widely-held myths. During the Depression and before, millions of working-class and middle-class civil-service workers traded off higher hourly wages for what amounted to a guaranteed annual wage. But in the War and for twenty years afterward, near-full employment destroyed these workers' "trade-off" advantage. In private industry workers were now employed year-round, while civil servants were stuck without the right to strike, generally without union protection, and with what appeared to be permanently depressed wages. As the myth crumbled, government workers at all levels grew impatient with life-long commitments to compromise on what were socially considered low-status, stodgy jobs.

The radicalization of the American working class in the 1930s had found little open expression from public workers. Now, with workers in the private sector, they seek new

values and demand more gratification from their work. A small, tidy home with a good roof, a lawn, and a surrounding fence is no longer considered the formula for happiness. Public workers are in fact, by the recentness of their self-earned release from old prejudices and by their objective position in a social crisis, in a vanguard position of today's class struggle. Their ranks contain occupations ranging from professional categories to blue-collar and unskilled classifications, including Third World Americans in great numbers. The bulk of them perform their labors in the large central city cores abandoned at night by most people of middle and upper incomes. They do away with the city's refuse, run the transportation systems, and provide all the services necessary for the performance of business and industry during the day and the entertainment services of the evening. As the bedroom communities begin to fill, the cities are left to them and in a sense appear to be theirs — a quite different condition from three decades ago when the middle and upper classes maintained the constant visibility in the "downtowns".

Historically, great advances have been registered in the class struggle on a national basis, within particular industries; but the most dramatic manifestations of advance have been within single metropolitan areas. The Seattle General Strike of 1919 was the highest point reached in the class struggle of that time. The San Francisco and Minneapolis General Strikes of the 1930s encouraged the growth of the CIO. The Oakland General Strike led by city transportation workers and truckers after World War II raised the level of its participants tenfold more than those whose industry-wide strikes created the 1946 Strike Wave. Since the 1940s, no private-industry struggles have individually shaken the ruling class as much as those of public employees at the city level. In city after city, as in St. Louis in June of 1971, union officials not known for revolutionary conduct have entered city council chambers with council in session to observe crucial votes of city monies and, after witnessing decisions that denied their members' demands, exited to

make immediate strike calls.

In Spring 1970, a strike of San Francisco city nurses threatened changes in the city charter and thereby threatened the established bargaining system for all city workers. A near-general strike situation resulted. For short periods over a four-day span sections of Lower Market Street were used for workers' parking. Mayor Aliotto owed his office to labor support, and particularly to the longshoremen and Teamsters. He was faced with a city council that was unwilling to make the necessary concessions that would allow him to maintain his support. The longshoremen and truckers became involved in support of the city workers, but it was the work stoppage of the city transportation employees that began to shut down the entire city. That strike was called not by direct mandate from the ranks, but by an international representative of the Transport Workers Union in New York City. If the terms spelled out in the city charter were manipulated by the city fathers in order to beat the nurses, his union's officialdom might have had future trouble getting their cut of the "city pie" in the usual manner. They bureaucratically issued a strike call. With the threat of a general strike, Aliotto was able to go to the city council and obtain the concessions that would keep the peace.

The Memphis Garbage Workers' (AFSCME) strike of 1967 offers another important but too-little-known case. It is improbable that any strike of several hundred industrial workers in the South could have propelled into motion a large section of a major Southern city's population. The tragic assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in connection with the strike has tended to push aside recognition that even without King's murder the strike would still have had regional, national, and international significance. American labor has not obtained full value from this experience, due to the failure of AFSCME to bring full organizational support to the garbage workers in the early stages of their unionization effort. But again, this should not dull the importance of the development and what it presages.

An even more dramatic example of the explosiveness of "routine" unionism among public employees is provided by Manhattan workers over the last five years. Here as elsewhere, negotiations and strikes of teachers, sanitation workers and police, subway and food-produce workers all immediately take on a political character and challenge governmental authority — all the more so because of the breakdown of legitimacy and credibility of governmental authority at the national level. (Big city mayors, it should be noted in passing, have become national figures of importance, and city workers are in a position to make or destroy their aspirations for national office.) In last year's strike of New York sewage workers, water workers, and bridge tenders, called by locals of the AFSCME and the Teamsters, the purported original strategy of the unions was to first shut off the water in Rockefeller Center and Wall Street, as a direct warning to Governor Rockefeller, who was holding up monies for already negotiated pensions. If that failed to be effective, the sewage systems were to be shut down, followed by the shut-down of many of the bridges connecting Manhattan to the mainlands. This strategy was supposed to have become fouled when the bridge workers pulled out first, thus creating an immediate near-general strike. The results were instantly felt in public worker-management relations across the nation. Plans for collective-bargaining bills pending in many state legislatures were halted in panic and indecision. Not for some time will the full effects of this new spectre on the power establishment be known.

"PROFESSIONALS" AND THE NEW UNIONS

Volumes have now been written about the appearance of "professional" unions on a mass basis during the 1960s. For socialists, there are some especially pertinent aspects to this phenomenon. There is now an independent base in organized labor for artists and intellectuals who have a working-class orientation and are no longer dependent on

labor officialdom. Moreover, because school teachers and social workers particularly are simultaneously city workers and "professionals", these sectors provide a bridge between the unskilled and semi-skilled workers and highly trained white-collar workers.

Simultaneous with the appearance of mass "professional" unions has been an increase in unionization among other white-collar employees and technical workers. The unionization of the engineering staff at Chrysler Corporation is particularly significant. The effect of unionization of all white-collar sectors will considerably change the nature of future class struggles. During the labor struggles of the 1930s the national power establishment could count on active or passive support for its position among the counterparts of those who are now themselves forming unions and becoming involved in strikes, frequently breaking injunctions. This traditional popular base of support for the ruling class within the general public has now been visibly narrowed.

Professionals have been organizing into unions for many of the same reasons that have caused a new radicalization among public and blue-collar workers. Technological advances and the long period of relative full employment have raised expectations of the rewards they expect from life and work. Many of them join unions with untarnished enthusiasm and very high hopes. They find, however, that their unions are run by men who do not share their enthusiasm, but rather run these institutions on the basis of ideas that are very nearly those of the labor officialdom in the long-established unions. More than most blue-collar workers, they expect unions to be politically involved. The salaries of many professionals are determined by legislation as in the case of teachers and social workers. Freed from the control of conservative bureaucrats, they have conducted struggles in which the best union veterans could take pride. If corraled by a capable but traditional union bureaucracy, an incident such as Oceanhill-Brownsville can result. But even in developments like the latter the tremendous new

power of professionals is clear. The meaning of that power has not been integrated into the perspectives of American socialists, either in relation to the forces for progress or in relation to the mobilization for reaction within the middle class that is bound to occur as the rulers seek counter-organizational vehicles comparable to the new unions.

The growth of the number of white-collar, technical, and professional workers in the labor force and their radicalization has led some radical sociologists like Lucien Goldman, Serge Mallet, and Andre Gorz to develop theories on "the new working class", and there is now a sizeable body of literature on the subject. Almost all the new theories contain revisions of Marxism. The failure of socialists to deal with these theories seriously and in detail has created an ideological clutter, confusing those in search of radical solutions. The competition they represent, however, presents only one of the reasons why the new phenomenon must be dealt with. Contrary to the belief of some, the new radicalization in the middle class is not simply the result of the mechanization, routinization, and computerization of what formerly were relatively gratifying career positions. With the growth of the demand for workers with greater amounts of formal education and the simultaneous deterioration of the quality of work experience has come the inevitable social response. The system as it is equips ever larger numbers of people with sophisticated skills and then places them in jobs where they are denied the dignity of making the most elementary decisions connected with their work. Consequently they develop many of the same strivings and attitudes as workers on heavy industrial assembly-line jobs. Thus, as never before there exists a basis for working-class and middle-class unity. Moreover, it is possible to project hypotheses about the actual merging of sections of the two classes in actuality as well as in basic interests and needs. This both supplements and complements the Hobsbawm thesis mentioned above.



Still another and different problem of ideological clutter exists due to the growth of white-collar and professional

jobs. Liberal social critics have for more than a decade been using official census statistics in order to announce the shrinking percentage of blue-collar jobs in the labor force. Often gleefully, they predict that the number of industrial workers will shrink to a point at which they are no more than a hindering minority. Some of the statistical juggling goes so far as to project the virtual extinction of industrial workers, and is generally accompanied by the glib conclusion that the necessity to consider Marxism seriously has been ended once and for all. The vulgarizations are relatively easy to deal with, particularly with the growth of working-class militancy. But in varying degrees these theories have created cobwebs of doubt in the minds of many. Andrew Levinson has recently provided socialists with a valuable tool to begin the needed clean-up. In "The Working-Class Majority" (Nation, December 13, 1971), he exposes the myth of the middle-class majority. Among other things he unjuggles the statistics of the Census Bureau, which has been classifying distribution and service workers in the white-collar category; garbage workers, waiters, waitresses, elevator operators, municipal workers, and many more as "service workers"; and farm workers in a special category. By placing all manual workers in the same category, Levinson finds that over 56% of all jobs in the labor force are blue-collar in content. Consideration of white-collar and professional jobs aside, he has in brief supplied arguments that revisionists of Marxism cannot stand against—providing that socialists expand upon his analysis.

IV. Youth and the War

Analysis of radicalization or change in attitudes among working-class youth has yet to be assembled. The best opportunity so far provided to allow a start is presented by the crisis earlier this year in the General Motors plant at Lordstown, Ohio. The Lordstown workers, whose average age is 24, have supplied the first pure test of the generation

of workers who entered the work force in the last decade and who experienced the accelerated motion for societal change that began in the mid-1960s. The weakness of the test lies precisely in its purity. Few work places have so low an average age, and no other assembly-line technology is as "advanced" as that in Lordstown. Nevertheless, it is the one real test available. The strike occurred in the largest corporation in the world and in the industry that has made the United States unique among industrial countries, for in all other industrial nations the heaviest capital investment is in a producer's-goods industry. For these reasons as well as the questions posed for the entire working class and society by the participants, the Lordstown strike, its background, and its aftermath demand full study.

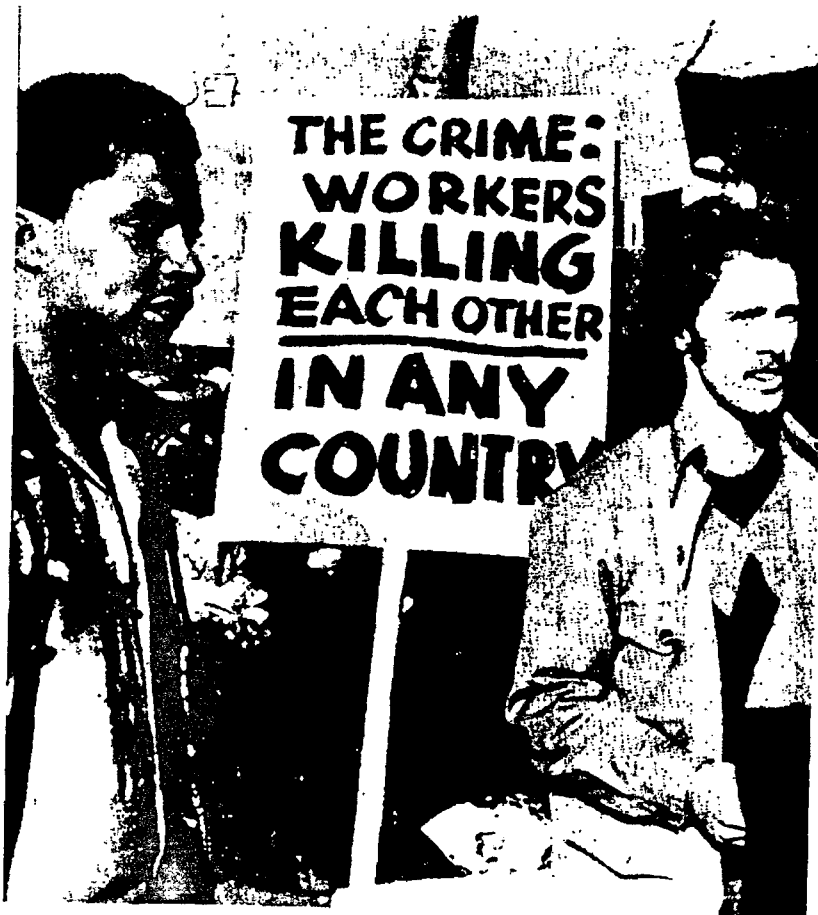
From press coverage alone it is known that the Lordstown workers made attempts at the beginnings of working-class solidarity both on a national and on an international basis. They wanted to send a rank-and-file delegation to the ILWU to get the longshoremen to extend their strike in order to temporarily keep off the market the small Japanese cars that compete with Vega. They also wanted to send a rank-and-file delegation from their plant to Japan to talk to auto workers about the necessity of establishing humanized work standards in auto production on an international basis. Their attempts were frustrated by the leadership of the UAW, but the important aspect is the effort to break out of established, conservative, and official methods of labor struggle.

Prior to the outbreak of the strike the GM management went to press with elaborate stories about how their work force was attempting to restrict the output of autos. Just before and during the strike, the media interviewed numbers of Lordstown workers about their attitudes toward their jobs. With no further information, it is already clear that the new generation of workers has in some respects junked the work ethic that their parents and more-distant ancestors developed prior to World War II.

Most important, the Lordstown crisis revealed a widespread basis for a real consciousness of class. In their fight against "Gee-mad" (GMAD), the General Motors Assembly Division, and the computerization of work they have made clear: "We don't want to end up like our mothers and fathers who have worked for you, worn out by the time we reach middle age. We want to make this a better job and a better life." Contained in this message is the realization that they are stuck in industrial employment, not far from the further realization that the division of labor is institutionalized on the basis of class and perpetuated largely on a hereditary basis. Secondly, the Lordstown strike momentarily revealed what American mass-production workers have been attempting to accomplish since the 1930s: the escalation of the drive against the speed-up to a drive for obtaining power over the standards of production. The gigantic amount of publicity given Lordstown made it impossible to avoid this revelation or bury it (as has been done before) through institutionalized collective bargaining. Finally, the national press attention served to dramatize the counter-cultural life-styles of young workers. Perhaps no other single event has done so much to increase tolerance of such styles among older generations of workers.

In many instances it is clear that the appearance of counter-cultural styles in the young working class is related to the War in Southeast Asia. Viet vets appear at plants in increasing numbers with clothing and hair styles more similar to their middle-class peers than to their parents' styles. In general, they have become accepted and respected by older workers. Yet they have no organizations, forums in the unions, or other vehicles to talk out their experiences among themselves. Unions have done nothing to help assimilate them socially or to help them overcome the trauma of their war experience, and politicals have made no apparent effort to push the matter. Yet it is certain that these veterans, like those of previous wars, have a commonality of experience and will seek to establish some sort of common external identity.

Vets



Fifth Estate photo by Ken Fireman

In the struggles of the 1930s, one of the major bases for reactionary attacks on unions were the war veteran organizations. Whole posts of the American Legion commonly acted as strike breakers, as in the infamous attack on San Francisco maritime workers in 1934. Today, on the other hand, Asian war veteran committees in local unions around the country could become the basis for a new labor-oriented veteran organization which could, among other things, reunite the working-class and middle-class youths who fought that war. Continued recession and deepening economic crisis will further unite the veterans as an autonomous force. If progressive and socialist forces fail to gain these young workers' allegiance, reactionaries will make their own bid more successfully. An attentiveness to working-class youth

as an entity in itself as well as a part of the total work force is essential to success in this struggle. As in other areas, young socialist workers have a great deal of listening and learning to do so that they may in turn teach others who do not have the same benefit of exposure.

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The preceding article represents excerpts from a longer discussion prepared for International Socialists, somewhat revised for publication in Radical America.

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